

WASHINGTON, DC - Congressman Steny Hoyer released the following statement today cautioning seniors to carefully examine their options before enrolling in the new Medicare prescription drug discount card program.

Starting today, seniors and people with disabilities will be allowed to sign up for a new HHS drug discount card. The prescription drug discount card program is part of the Republican Medicare prescription drug bill passed by Congress and signed by the President late last year. This transitional program will only be in effect from June 2004 through December 2005.

“Today is the first day that the Medicare-approved prescription drug discount card program is available. However, I strongly encourage Maryland seniors to proceed with caution before deciding that this program will significantly reduce the cost of their prescription drugs.

“Seniors will be barraged with advertisements in the coming weeks and it is important that seniors separate fact from fiction to protect their interests. In fact, seniors expecting to see a large reduction in the cost of their prescription drugs should not get their hopes up.

“There are several reasons why this program may yield fewer benefits than have been advertised by the Bush Administration. First, the insurance companies, not Medicare, are in charge of this discount card and determine how much and on which drugs seniors save.

“Medicare beneficiaries will be limited to one Medicare-approved card and will only be able to change cards once during the 2004 year-end open enrollment period. This prohibits them from maximizing savings through multiple cards or from changing cards during the year to follow the lowest prices for their drugs.

“Furthermore, the companies offering these cards can change the drugs they cover and the discounts they have promised every seven days. This means that seniors who sign up for a card because it discounts the medication their doctor has prescribed will be stuck if the card suddenly changes the discount or drops the drug.

“Moreover, while the cards are being promoted as offering a significant price discount on

prescription drugs, the law does not require any specific level of savings. The Department of Health and Human Service has simply suggested that the cards will save between 10 percent and 25 percent. There is nothing in the law or regulations that would guarantee seniors get such savings on even one of their medications.

“Navigating the maze of available cards will be difficult. Cards may offer good deals on some medications, but no value for others. And, not all pharmacies will participate with all cards. Seniors searching for the card that is right for them will have to do some research, and there is no guarantee one is available that will meet their needs.

“However, it is important to note that some low-income seniors may be eligible for a \$600 credit and should contact their local State Health Insurance Assistance program for further information.

“I will continue to fight for common sense measures like allowing the government to negotiate drug discounts on behalf of the 40 million beneficiaries already enrolled in Medicare, and allowing seniors and people with disabilities to import safe drugs from Canada, which would result in real savings for seniors and lower drug prices nationwide.

“In light of the significant number of options seniors and people with disabilities already face, this complicated program may not be the best choice. I urge those who are considering signing up for this card to carefully consider all of their options and seek help to determine what’s best for them.”

For more information contact Congressman Hoyer’s District Offices or local State Health Insurance Assistance Programs.

Congressman Hoyer’s District Offices:

Serving Prince George's, Anne Arundel and Calvert Counties: (301) 474-0119

Serving Charles and St. Mary's Counties: (301) 843-1577

State Health Insurance Assistance Programs:

Anne Arundel: 410-222-4464

Calvert: 301-855-1170

Charles: 301-934-9305

Prince George's: 301-699-2893

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